



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

Vale District Office  
100 Oregon Street  
Vale, Oregon 979 18

August 1992



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# South Fork of the Walla Walla River Area Plan Amendment



As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interest of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

BLM-OR-PT-92-28-1792



# United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Vale District Office

100 Oregon Street

Vale, Oregon 97918

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IN REPLY REFER TO

1613

Dear Public Land User:

Enclosed for your information is the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) final decision for the South Fork of the Walla Walla River Area of Environmental Concern (ACEC) and the accompanying management plan.

The decision is to designate 1256.69 acres of BLM administered lands along the South Fork of the Walla Walla River as an ACEC.

Thanks to all of you who commented and participated in the plan amendment and development of the management plan for the area. Most comments BLM received were in support of the designation and protection of the resources. Some citizens indicated a concern for the long term decision to locate and focus all types of access on the north side of the river. Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) representatives expressed concern to perpetuate their access on to the U.S. Forest Service trails. Many comments indicated a strong need for an organized enforcement program. Both Umatilla County and Boise Cascade requested some minor changes in the boundary of the ACEC. Both have been made and are reflected on the map. Neither change had an impact to the management of ACEC values.

BLM will be developing site specific plans and designs to facilitate construction of management facilities. We look forward to continued public participation and support. Thank you for your involvement in our efforts.

Sincerely yours,

James E. May  
District Manager

**U.S. Department of the Interior**  
Bureau of Land Management

Vale District Office  
100 Oregon Street  
Vale, Oregon 97918

Baker Resource Area Office  
P.O. Box 987  
Baker City, Oregon 97814

**South Fork of the  
Walla Walla River Area  
Plan Amendment**

**July 1992**

# RECORD OF DECISION:

It is the decision of the Bureau of Land Management to adopt and implement the preferred alternative described in the Environmental Assessment for the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River Area of Critical Environmental Concern dated February 1992. This decision would incorporate the management actions described under that alternative.

## ***RATIONALE:***

The decision designates the Bureau of Land Management administered lands in the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. The purpose is to recognize the relevance and importance of the fisheries, wildlife, riparian, and scenic values found within the area. Furthermore, there is a need to provide protection and management for these values because the area is heavily used by recreationists resulting in sustained severe impacts to the riparian areas and hillsides.

In addition to providing management direction for protection of the ACEC values, the proposed designation and preferred alternative will amend the 1989 Baker Resource Area Resource Management Plan (RMP) as follows:

### **Oil and Gas Leasing and Mineral Management**

- Changes the management decision in the Baker Resource Area Management Plan Record of Decision from:

All new oil and gas leases subject to standard protective stipulations plus a winter season restrictive stipulation on (1 19.98) acres; -

to:

All new oil and gas leases subject to standard protective stipulations plus a special "no surface occupancy" stipulation for all public land within the ACEC boundary, presently about 1,256.69 acres, plus an additional 302 acres of private surface with Federal Minerals Estate.

- Prohibit development of mineral material resources within the ACEC boundary unless needed on an "emergency basis" to protect ACEC values. This area has no known potential for the occurrence of locatable mineral resources, therefore, withdrawal from mineral entry under the U.S. mining laws, as amended, is not proposed.

### **Forest and Woodland Management**

- Reduces harvest on 120 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) timber lands from approximately 15% to approximately 1% to facilitate management for ACEC values.

## **Grazing Management**

- Grazing leases will no longer be issued on BLM lands within the ACEC boundary.

## **District Manager**

### Findings and Recommendation:

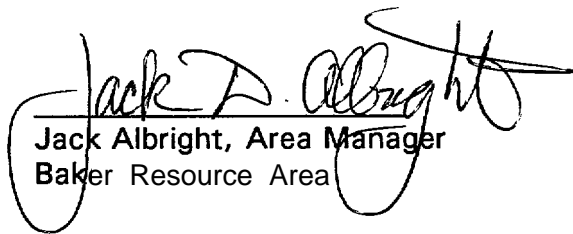
There were no protests filed with the Director of the BLM and no inconsistencies with State or Local plans, programs or policies identified by the Governor of Oregon.

We recommend adoption of the preferred alternative of the Plan Amendment Environmental Assessment, for the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River ACEC of February 1992 which is to designate 1256.69 acres as an ACEC.

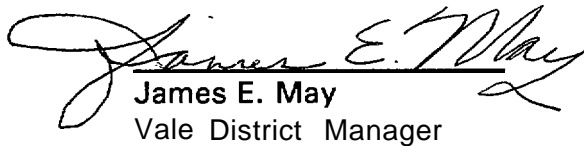
## ***FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:***

On the basis of the information contained in the Environmental Assessment and all other information available to me as summarized above, it is the determination of the Bureau that neither of the alternatives constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is unnecessary and will not be prepared. In addition, the amendment to the Baker Resource Area Resource Management Plan does not affect the entire resource area and does not substantially affect other resource programs to the extent that the resource area would initiate an Environmental Impact Statement.

Recommended to the State Director:

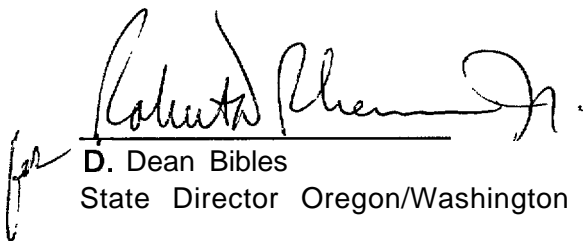
  
Jack Albright, Area Manager  
Baker Resource Area

7-14-92  
Date

  
James E. May  
Vale District Manager

7-14-92  
Date

I approve the decision for the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River Area of Critical Environmental Concern and Finding of No Significant Impact. This document meets the requirement for agency decision making as provided in 40 CFR 1505.

  
for D. Dean Bibles  
State Director Oregon/Washington

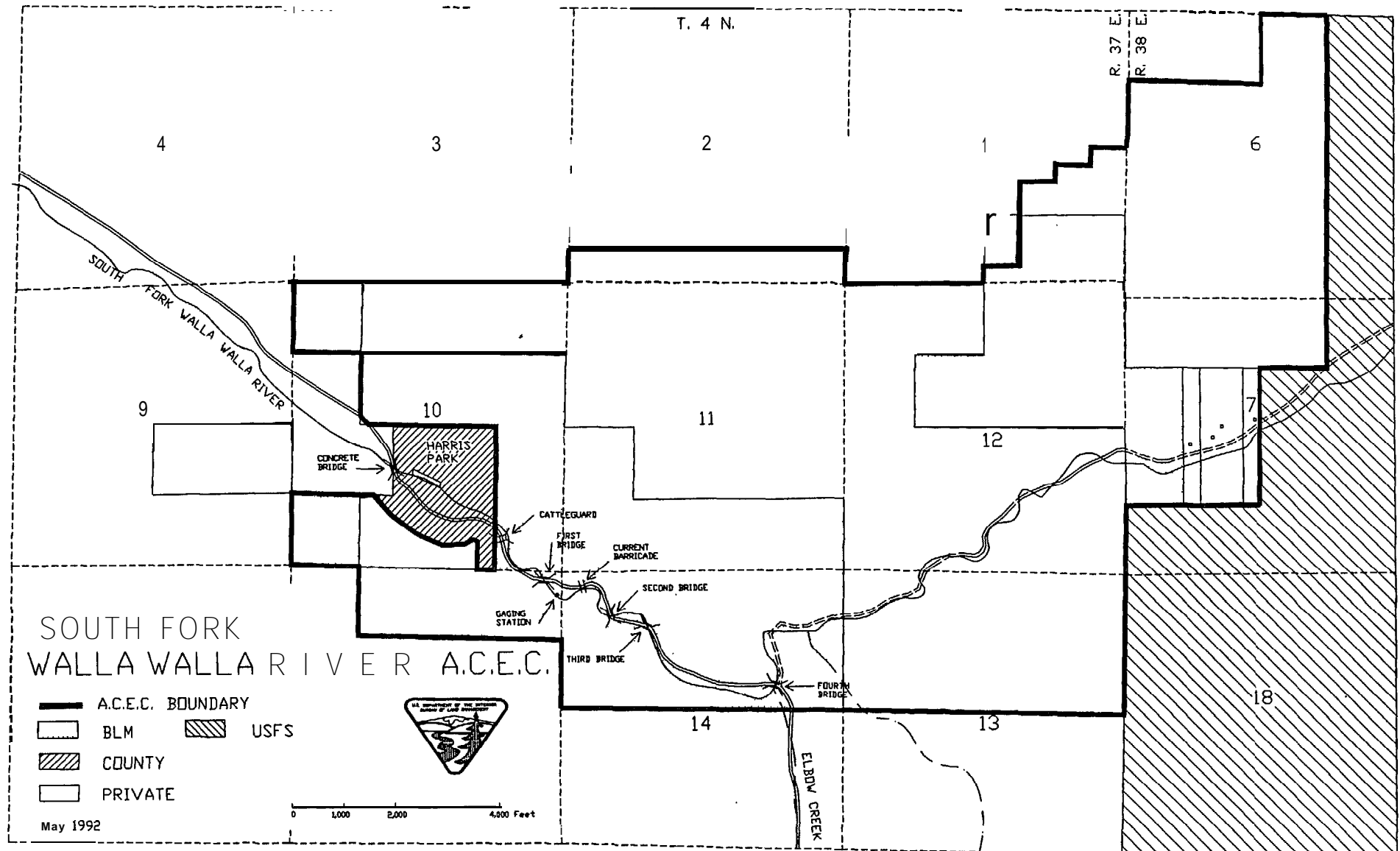
7/20/92  
Date

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
Bureau of Land Management  
Vale District



# **SOUTH FORK OF WALLA WALLA RIVER ACEC DESIGNATION, MANAGEMENT PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT EA #035-1 -04**

## ***INTRODUCTION***

The purpose of this document is to amend the Baker Resource Management Plan (**RMP**) to include the designation of the South Fork of the Walla Walla River as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (**ACEC**).

On the lands managed by BLM, the riparian community, fisheries habitat and water quality of the South Fork of the Walla Walla River are threatened by continued indiscriminate recreational use of street vehicles and off-highway vehicles (**OHV's**). Off-highway vehicles (**OHV's**) are motorized track or wheeled vehicles designed for cross-country travel over any type of terrain. For the purpose of this document they are specifically motorcycles, **ATV's** and snowmobiles. The goal of this designation is to provide necessary special management direction to protect and enhance the relevant and important values of the riparian ecosystem, fisheries habitat and scenic values while still allowing for some recreational use.

These lands are located on the South Fork of the Walla Walla River in Umatilla County, Oregon in the western foothills of the Blue Mountains, Township **4N.**, Range **37E.**, Willamette Meridian. The site is situated in a relatively narrow canyon bottom extending up both hillsides to the north and south of the river. The wooded river edge supports the majority of recreational activity in the area. This area also serves as a gateway for limited access to a Forest Service OHV use area.

The site is situated close to a number of urban areas. Milton-Freewater, OR is approximately 12 miles to the northwest, Walla Walla, WA is 20 miles north and Pendleton, OR is 46 miles southwest. This is the closest recreational area in the Blue Mountains for Milton-Freewater, Walla Walla, and the Tri-Cities. The proximity of the area to population centers leads to intensified recreational use, particularly during summer months. Study observations in the early 1980's demonstrated that during the peak use period 57% of the visitation is by Washington residents, 40% by Oregonians, and 3% from other states and Canadian provinces.

This portion of the South Fork of the Walla Walla River Canyon is environmentally sensitive for a number of reasons. Virtually all the area's use occurs in the riparian zone, which is a fragile and complex ecosystem with a distinct vegetative structure and corresponding microclimate. In addition, the size of the riparian zone has already been reduced by road development up the

canyon bottom.

The effects of recreational overcrowding are evident in the canyon. The area displays excessive litter, high levels of noise, soil compaction and defoliation from extensive vehicle parking. The BLM lands were designated to a "limited" off-road-vehicles class in 1980 which restricted all vehicles to identified routes and trails. However, there was little or no enforcement of this designation, and use increased extensively in recent years with stretches of riparian areas, wet bogs and meadows sustaining severe damage from vehicles. The construction of the four log stringer bridges by Boise Cascade (as part of the right-of-way agreement) in 1979 further facilitated this use by improving access particularly to BLM administered lands. When Boise Cascade's right-of-way was renewed, they became responsible for bridge repair only if they were to haul logs. In February of 1991, BLM attempted to repair the two lower log stringer bridges. The decking was in need of repair to provide for public safety. The first bridge decking was replaced. BLM crews found the second bridge's main support stringers to have dry rot. The required repairs to the second bridge exceeded the BLM's 1991 funds for repair. BLM engineers indicated similar disrepair on the third and fourth bridges as well. A barricade was placed below the second bridge restricting further access by street legal vehicles. **OHV's**, mountain bikes, equestrians and hikers were still permitted access.

From February to September, 1991, BLM staff observed a remarkable recovery of riparian vegetation in many of the previously used "parking areas" as well as bogs and meadows. There continues to be a problem with **OHV's**, creating new trails up hillsides and at the bench above Elbow Creek intersection with the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River and in some other areas.

Based on the recovery of the riparian vegetation and the need to provide special management for the protection of the ACEC values, this designation and management plan recommends continued restriction of street legal vehicles beyond the current barricade location and strict enforcement of the "limited" classification for OHV use to existing designated routes.

## ***SETTING***

The proposed ACEC is located on the west flank of the Blue Mountain uplift. The South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River has eroded a steep and narrow canyon in Columbia River basalt flows. Basaltic outcrops are evident throughout. The topography is steep, adjacent to the relatively flat river bottom. The north and south slopes are dissected by several small drainages running perpendicular to the river.

Soils of this area are mainly coarse silt loams formed from windblown silt and weathered basalt. Soil depth varies from 2-6 feet on north exposures, to less than 18 inches on south slopes.

The South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River is a tributary of the **Walla Walla** River which flows into the Columbia River. The South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River, fed by snowpack from the Blue Mountains and numerous springs, experiences seasonal flow fluctuations. There is a U.S.G.S. stream gauging station located one mile downstream from Elbow Creek. Information has been recorded at this station for 53 years. Records demonstrate that for the **53-year** period, the average discharge was 177 cubic feet per second, equaling 128,200 acre-feet per year. Stream flow will generally peak early in April during the spring runoff and reach a low in September.

Extremes for the river were recorded during winter months when conditions ranged from droughts to heavy runoff from precipitation and melting snow. The maximum discharge was recorded on January 29, 1965, at 2,530 cubic feet per second. The minimum discharge was 72 cubic feet per second recorded on February 14, 1932. Generally, water quality is good with the stream running cool and clear most of the year. However, turbidity increases during spring run-off and heavy precipitation events.

The climate of this area typifies that of the western flank of the Blue Mountains. It is a relatively dry area with most of the precipitation occurring during fall and spring when storms are most frequent. Prevailing winds over the area are out of the west and southwest most of the year and from the west and northwest during winter months. Snow during winter months will range from a few inches along the stream bottom to a few feet on the higher hillsides. The study area ranges from 2,000 feet elevation at the river to over 3,700 feet at the canyon rim. The frost-free period ranges from approximately 61 days at the higher elevations to nearly 150 days on the stream floodplain. Temperatures can often exceed 90 degrees during summer months. Zero degree temperatures or less can occur during winter months. Annual precipitation in the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River Canyon will generally range between 20 and 30 inches.

This area comprises a unique assemblage rarely found in the Pacific Northwest of many small plant communities of both a **dryland** and wetland nature. These communities are a result of the wide variety of exposures, slopes, moisture regimes and soil conditions found in the ACEC. Their uniqueness and vulnerability are in part due to the fact that they exist within a relatively small area. Even with incomplete inventories to date, at least 300 distinct plant species have been found in these communities within the river corridor.

**Dryland** communities are represented on open south-facing hillsides and are made up of native bunchgrasses and annual grasses, forbs and scattered shrub pockets. Dry cliff communities are composed primarily of forbs with scattered grasses and an occasional patch of fern. Many forest and woodland communities are found within the area, ranging from drier, more rocky environments supporting maple, **ninebark** and snowberry to a more **mesic** forest of Douglas fir and grand fir. Other conifer species include ponderosa pine and Englemann spruce, with a small population of Pacific yew in the area.

Within the riparian zone, a complex mixture of wetland communities contribute significantly to the area's uniqueness. Bogs and seeps support a wide variety of mosses, ferns, lichens, sedges and rushes in a fragile environment that is highly susceptible to mechanical damage and soil compaction caused by trampling and vehicles. Water drips from unique grottos where ferns and lichens grow in the protected north facing cliffs. Springs and tributary streams are dominated by wild rose, elderberry, chokecherry, snowberry and water birch.

Another species of interest, western paper birch, is a component of a small, moist community within the riparian zone. A rich diversity of forbs, grasses, rushes and sedges are associated with the riparian zone. This area in total represents the most complex assemblage of plant communities and individual species found on BLM lands in the Vale District.

The South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River Canyon habitat type can support a rich variety of land animals, the majority of which are dependent upon the riparian area. The canyon has some unique winter range qualities. During severe winter months, when snow is deep in the higher terrain, deer and elk migrate into the area to obtain needed forage. The open south slopes are favored foraging sites for these ungulates during this time of stress. Millions of wintering lady bug beetles are a unique feature of the area. They congregate on riparian foliage, particularly

on the trunks of rough-barked Douglas fir trees. These beetles begin congregating in the canyon in late October and will reside there until late April or early May. They are a service to local agriculturists by eating destructive aphids and are of economic importance for that reason. The stream itself supports a healthy population of rainbow and bull trout which thrive on aquatic insects. The South Fork of the Walla Walla River is also an anadromous fishery with a noteworthy summer steelhead run.

## ***RELEVANT AND IMPORTANT VALUES***

### **Scenic Values**

The South Fork Walla Walla River ACEC contains exceptional scenery in a variety of landforms, vegetation, water, and color with few cultural modifications to the landscape. The rating of the visual resource factors resulted in “A” scenic quality, the highest rating category containing outstanding visual resource characteristics. The outstanding **characteristics include: high vertical relief as expressed in prominent cliffs; a variety of vegetative types expressed in interesting forms, textures, and patterns, clear; clean cascading water and rich color combinations.** The ACEC is a component of a Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class II area, resulting in stipulations on resource activities within the boundaries of the ACEC.

### **Fisheries Values**

Bull trout, a Category II Candidate Species under the Endangered Species Act, and the anadromous steelhead trout, spawn and rear within the proposed ACEC boundary. The margined sculpin, a non-game fish which is on the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (ODFW) sensitive species list due to its limited distribution, resides there also.

The bull trout population is abundant in the South Fork of the Walla Walla River. BLM policy stipulates that candidate species will be given special management considerations and be included as priority species in land use plans. Bull trout need cold, clean water to survive and reproduce. Management actions resulting in lower water quality would reduce their population. Human activities have already reduced or eliminated bull trout populations in the majority of their historic habitat throughout the West.

Columbia River Basin runs of anadromous salmon and steelhead have been similarly impacted by human activities. This stream currently supports a steelhead run and it formerly supported a spring chinook salmon run. That run may be reestablished in this reach in the future by fisheries managers. Protection and enhancement of anadromous fisheries in the Columbia River basin, which includes the South Fork of the Walla Walla River, is an objective of the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act. It is also consistent with the policies of the BLM and many other agencies and groups.

The BLM reach of the South Fork of the Walla Walla River has regionally and nationally significant fishery values. Safeguarding these values will help maintain the biodiversity of the region and the nation.

## Riparian Values

The east-west orientation of the river, the latitude, the "V" shaped canyon and the climatic conditions create the unique riparian habitat that is found along the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River. The riparian habitat consists of three separate but interrelated plant communities. The sheer rock faces and outcroppings with their seeps and springs create a moist micro-habitat for mosses and ferns. The springs create bogs and marshy areas along the toe of the slopes providing habitat for sedges, rushes and grasses. Along the river's edges a highly diverse and well developed shrub and tree community exists. Species found along the river are ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, grand fir, white fir, alder, willow, paper birch, water birch, Pacific yew, black cottonwood, mockorange, ninebark, serviceberry, western mugwort, red-osier dogwood, elderberry and snowberry. Western paper birch, *Betula papyrifera* var. *commutata*, has not been previously reported for Oregon, although it is found in southeastern Washington. This is of regional importance due to its uniqueness.

## OTHER IMPORTANT VALUES

### Wildlife Values

The area is within a critical winter range for about 1,100 Rocky Mountain elk. The dense undergrowth in the riparian area provides habitat for white-tailed deer and ruffed grouse. Mule deer are found in the upland habitats. Black bear are found throughout the area. The area has been identified as suitable Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep habitat. No wild sheep occur here currently, however the area has been identified as a reintroduction site by the ODFW. The rim rock habitat also provides habitat for cougar and bobcats.

Because of the diverse and well developed riparian habitat, and the adjacent uplands, a rich variety of non-game wildlife species can be found here such as shrews, bats, ground squirrels, warblers, wrens, goshawk, sharp-shinned hawk, wood peckers, purple finches, water dipper, mergansers, rubber boa, rattlesnake, Pacific tree frogs, newts and salamanders. Wolverine, marten and peregrine falcons are known to occur in the immediate vicinity of the ACEC. The corridor area is also a major wintering area for ladybug beetles.

The drainage serves as a major migration corridor for many wildlife species linking upper and lower elevational habitats.

### Forest and Woodland Values

The Baker Resource Area Operations Inventory indicates 246 BLM commercial forest acres within the proposed ACEC area. Douglas fir is the major forest type on 211 acres while ponderosa pine predominates on 35 acres.

These are typical northeast Oregon forest stands with Douglas fir/mixed conifers occupying the cool moist sites, and ponderosa pine on the dry south facing slopes. The Douglas fir ranges from 75 to 185 years in age with an area-wide average of about 130. The ponderosa pine averages about 110 years of age. Total standing coniferous volume in the area is approximately 4 million board feet. Timber stands currently appear to be healthy and vigorous.

Because the commercial forestland is similar to that found throughout the Blue Mountains, and because management for timber is physically limited (steep topography and lack of access), the forested area adjacent to the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River is currently neither important or relevant to the regional timber harvest.

However, these stands are relevant and important components of other resource values. They contribute to the aesthetics of the area, help stabilize soils on steep slopes, serve to moderate temperatures in the canyon, provide habitat for wildlife, and regulate stream flows.

## **Special Status Species**

### ***Plants***

There are no Federally listed plant species known to exist in this area. However, the western paper birch (*Betula papyrifera var. commutata*) and Pacific yew communities that are found in the bottom of the narrow canyon area represent species not common to this region.

Several of the species, ie. mountain lady-slipper, clustered lady-slipper and western paper birch, are species of interest and concern in Oregon to the Oregon State Natural Heritage Program. Clustered lady-slipper (*Cypripedium fasciculatum*) is recognized as a BLM sensitive species and is suspected to occur here.

This area needs to be thoroughly inventoried and a total species list and plant communities descriptions completed.

### ***Animals***

Bull trout have been designated as a Category II Candidate Species under the Endangered Species Act. Category II Candidate Species designation are for those species for which U.S. Fish and Wildlife service has information to indicate that listing is possibly appropriate.

The margined sculpin, a non-game fish on the ODFW sensitive species list due to its limited distribution also is found here.

## **Cultural Resources**

A reconnaissance of lands along the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River resulted in the identification of one historic site and one prehistoric property. Lands on the river may include traditional use locations of continuing importance to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

The relevance and importance of cultural resource values of the area cannot be defined until further investigations are undertaken. The river and its adjacent uplands have the potential to contain cultural resource properties; however, a systematic inventory of undisturbed lands would require subsurface investigations.

A free-standing, native cobblestone chimney is all that remains of a dwelling once situated at the river's edge downstream from the confluence of Elbow Creek. No historic archaeological or other structural remains were observed in association with the stone chimney. The dwelling was probably erected and occupied sometime during the period 1920-1940. The historic site is not known to have been associated with important local or regional events or persons, and is not considered a property of historic significance. An attractive and quaint feature, the stone chimney has some potential for interpretation if stabilized. Presently the hearth of the chimney is used by recreationists for building campfires and burning trash.

A prehistoric cultural resource is located within the boundaries of the proposed ACEC. The resource has been severely impacted by recreational use including off-road vehicle use, campfire construction, and erosion exacerbated by vehicle abuse. Subsurface testing is needed to evaluate the potential of the property to yield important information. The site will be protected, but unevaluated until further investigations are conducted.

According to historic records, the drainage of the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River was an important resource locality for the Native American inhabitants of the region. The river was identified for the perpetuation of traditional uses by present and future generations of Native Americans. Such historic use areas are important for maintaining traditional lifeways, and are identified among the rights reserved by the Umatilla, **Walla Walla**, and **Cayuse** tribes under the 1855 treaty which ceded these lands to the federal government.

## **Water Quality**

Although, "water quality" does not meet any of the specific criteria of relevance and importance for ACEC designation, it is an important characteristic due to the habitat requirements for fisheries. At the present time, the quality of the water in the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River is considered good based on the occurrence of bull trout and on visual observations.

The city of Milton-Freewater has an historic water right on the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River, however, the intake point is downstream from the proposed ACEC boundary area.

# ***FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTIONS***

## **Lands and Realty Management**

### ***Land Ownership***

The ACEC encompasses **3,385.65** acres of land as shown on the attached map. Land ownership within the ACEC is shown in the following table. The ACEC boundaries are based on resource values and do not take into account land ownership. However, ACEC actions only apply to public lands.



Bureau of Land Management	1,256.69
Umatilla County	0.00
Private	1,827.18
Private with Federal Minerals	<u>301.78</u>
Total	<b>3,385.65</b>

### ***RMP Direction***

The lands in the ACEC are located within the Baker **RMP's** land tenure adjustment Retention/Acquisition Zone. As such, management direction is to retain BLM lands in public ownership and to emphasize acquisitions through donation, exchange or purchase to increase public land holdings in the area. The Baker RMP identifies ACEC's as avoidance areas for the issuance of new Right-of-Way authorizations.

The Baker RMP also includes direction that lands acquired within special management areas (including **ACEC's**) will be managed in conformance with established guidelines for those areas.

### ***Access***

Physical and legal access to both the ACEC area and BLM lands is provided by Umatilla County Road number 600. As a result, adequate access for both administrative and public use exists.

### ***Existing Rights-of- Way***

A road right-of-way, (OR 16303), exists on the main road through the ACEC. This right-of-way was granted to Boise Cascade Corporation in 1978 to construct a road, with four bridges, to facilitate log hauling from company lands on Blalock Mountain. This right-of-way gives Boise Cascade a non-exclusive right to use the road for log hauling. The grant contains special stipulations designed to reduce conflicts with recreational use. Boise Cascade is responsible for maintenance of the road and bridges during periods they use the road for log hauling. Boise has no immediate plans for logging their lands on the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River.

A trail right-of-way, ORE 017223, exists along the river through the ACEC. This right-of-way (44L.D.513) was acquired by the U.S. Forest Service in 1947 for a trail to provide access to the Umatilla National Forest. When originally constructed the trailhead was in the vicinity of Harris Park and traversed the entire length of BLM land. The road construction in 1978 destroyed some of the trail and the remaining sections between Harris Park and Elbow Creek have received limited use.

The road from Elbow Creek on up the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River was used for access to private land and US Forest Service land until February, 1991 when the bridges were closed. This was considered "casual use" and did not require a right-of-way.

A stream gauging station is located within the ACEC and is operated by the U.S.G.S.

The **SE¼ SE%** of section 1 is withdrawn as a public water reserve. The withdrawal segregates the lands from the public land laws and non-metalliferous mining activities. The original purpose of a public water reserve was to cover public lands containing

springs and waterholes needed or used by the public for watering purposes. As a part of the Bureau-wide review process, the withdrawal was recommended for revocation.

## Oil and Gas Leasing and Minerals Management

The area is classified as being prospectively valuable for oil and gas resources. There is no known potential for the occurrence of any other locatable or leasable mineral resources. The Columbia River basalt often is a good source for aggregate (crushed rock source).

The Federal mineral estate is open for location under the U.S. Mining Laws, as amended. No mining claims have been located within or near this area.

The older rocks which occur under the Tertiary age Columbia River basalts have low to moderate potential for oil and gas. The sedimentary beds which occur between some of the Columbia River basalt flows have low to moderate potential for natural gas. At the present time, no commercial quantities of oil or natural gas have been discovered in any of these formations.

The Federal mineral estate in the vicinity of the proposed ACEC has been leased for oil and gas in the past. The most recent oil and gas lease, OR 43138, was terminated on January 1, 1991. This lease was authorized subject to standard stipulations. Standard stipulations are described on page 31 of the Baker Resource Management Plan Record of Decision (ROD).

When the oil and gas decisions in the ROD are implemented, there will be an additional special stipulation attached to any future leases for (119.98) acres of public land within the proposed ACEC. This will be a seasonal restriction on drilling operations during the period November 1 to April 15 due to critical elk and deer winter habitat. The following legal descriptions describe the lands which will be subject to the seasonal restriction:

T. 4 N., R. 37 E., WM

Sec. 10: Lot 4, NWNW, & SENW 119.98

Total acres within proposed ACEC with a seasonal stipulation.	119.98
--	--------

## Grazing Management

The BLM land along the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River has been subjected to both sheep and cattle grazing for many years. Because of past heavy use by livestock, the side slopes outside of the riparian zone, are still dominated by annual plant species, ie. cheatgrass, rattlesnake brome, etc. For an idea of what most of the riparian zone must have looked like at one time, one needs only to drive up the North Fork of the **Walla Walla** River. That portion of the South Fork which is not now being heavily impacted primarily by recreational uses has healed very nicely as most of the component plant species that make up good condition sites are present.

Prior to 1971, BLM issued a grazing lease to Harris Pine Mills, owners of most of the adjacent private lands. In 1971, the lease was transferred to Frazier Cattle Company of **Walla Walla**, Washington and it remained with them until 1984. In 1984, Harris Pine Mills sold their holdings in this area to Boise Cascade Corporation. Boise Cascade did not renew a grazing lease with Frazier Cattle Company, so Frazier dropped their BLM lease. Boise Cascade began leasing **their property north of the river to Norman Kelly for grazing cattle**.

The Boise Cascade property lying south of the river is under a grazing lease to Jim West of Lone, Oregon. This lease is for early spring use by sheep going to the U.S. Forest Service sheep allotment lying to the south and east of the BLM land.

The only livestock use on BLM land would be by stray livestock drifting down to the canyon bottom and the very limited use made by sheep during trailing. The U.S. Forest Service property just upstream from the BLM is not part of any grazing allotment. It is however, subject to some livestock use by straying animals.

## Recreation Management

A study done in 1981 revealed weekend visitor use alone to be approximately 7,000 visitors per year. The average weekend visitor use was approximately 135 visitors per weekend. The peak weekends were: Opening day of fishing - approximately 700 visitors, Memorial Day - approximately 600 visitors and July 4th - approximately 800 visitors. Visitor use in the last 10 years has increased but we have no current data. Visitor uses include; off-highway vehicle use, hiking, horseback riding, fishing, hunting, and sight-seeing.

The area has historically been used for a variety of off-highway-vehicle organized events including motorcycles and four-wheel drives. All these activities have taken place in trespass because no use permits have been issued. Little to no enforcement has occurred. These events have resulted in extensive damage to upland and riparian vegetation.

Prior to the bridges being closed, the primary staging area for off-highway-vehicle use was upriver from the fourth bridge. Since the bridges have been closed staging has occurred at the stream gauging station. Concentrated use at this site has resulted in the need for a developed staging area/trailhead facility.

The BLM lands have been closed to overnight camping since 1981. However, throughout **the years, BLM lands have experienced everything from long staying overnight camping** to occupancy trespass. This has somewhat been reduced since the bridges have been closed. Enforcement by BLM of this trespass problem as well as the vehicle trespass problem has been virtually non-existent. Some help in this area has been provided through earlier agreements with the Umatilla County Sheriff Department and Oregon State Police. However, this is no longer in effect due to lack of funding.

Indiscriminate use of firearms over the past few years has resulted in numerous complaints. The safety of visitors in the canyon corridor necessitates some type of firearm restrictions.

Virtually all the area's recreation use occurs in the sensitive riparian zone. In addition, the size of the riparian zone has been reduced through road improvements.

The effects of recreational use and overcrowding are evident throughout the canyon bottom. The area has suffered from excessive litter, high levels of noise, soil compaction and defoliation from extensive vehicle parking and OHV use, during the high use season (April through September).

The Forest Service, **Walla Walla** Ranger District, of the Umatilla National Forest, developed a trail system for motorized use, under a trail easement, that provides access to an off-road-vehicle area up river within the Umatilla National Forest. The trail is also used by hikers and horseback riders, sometimes resulting in conflicts between users.

## **Scenic Values Management**

The South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River ACEC is within a VRM Class II area. The objective of this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominate natural features of the characteristic landscape.

## **Fisheries Management**

Fish species currently present are steelhead, bull trout, margined sculpin and stocked rainbow trout. Spring chinook salmon were present until the 1950's. ODFW plans are to reintroduce spring chinook salmon possibly within the next five years. The river is currently being stocked with about 8,000 rainbow trout annually. They plan to stock about 100,000 steelhead smolts in the next several years.

No precise condition or trend data is available due to a lack of studies. It is unknown which human disturbances and/or natural conditions are the key limiting factors at present. Still, it is apparent that fishery habitat has been adversely impacted by human activities. Streambanks have been altered, and sediment input to the stream has increased. In-stream woody debris, which serves as fish cover, is not as common as it should be. The habitat condition is below it's potential. However, the stream is clear and cold and the fishery is healthy according to ODFW fish census data. The habitat could be improved with proper management.

In the past, unmanaged visitor use has caused a human waste and litter problem resulting in damage to fishery habitat. The vehicle use leading up the canyon caused water quality and stream stability problems in several locations. Off-road vehicle travel and concentrated recreational use has resulted in bank damage and/or sediment transport into the river. Livestock have occasionally caused similar erosion problems.

Because of limited street vehicle access during 1991, due to the condition of the bridges, there was less recreation use pressure in the upstream corridor. There was less pressure by fishermen on the fishery resource as well as less human waste and litter.

## **Riparian Management**

Existing and increased human use (associated with the road up the middle of the canyon and off-road parking) conflicts with maintaining and enhancing the riparian vegetation of the area. For example soil compaction from vehicle parking will restrict expansion of riparian plant species and very little resprouting will occur on the paper birch and other riparian species. Most trees are old. There should be more young plants in the community to allow for replacement. Uncompacted soil would encourage the growth of more young plants in the community.

Because street vehicles have been excluded from much of the riparian corridor this past year, there has been a noticeable increase in ground cover as well as expansion of riparian vegetation.

## **Wildlife Management**

The ODFW has identified the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River as a potential release site for the reintroduction of Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep. The Umatilla National Forest has a domestic sheep allotment above the BLM lands. Due to the possible disease transmission between domestic and wild sheep, ODFW is reluctant to proceed with the bighorn sheep transplant.

The canyon is used heavily by elk hunters. Most hunting occurs upriver from BLM lands. However, the BLM lands are used extensively for passage up the canyon. In years prior to the road closure camping in the riparian area was a frequent occurrence during hunting season. Since the road closure, camping occurred most often upriver from BLM lands and in Harris Park.

## **Forest and Woodland Management**

The Baker RMP identifies 126 acres of commercial forestland in the drainage as economically nonoperable, meaning timber values are far less than costs of harvest. This area has been removed from the allowable harvest base acreage. The remaining 120 acres (including 40 acres of recently acquired timberland) are generally located on, or immediately adjacent, to the canyon floor. These acres are included in the allowable harvest base acreage. However, the RMP further states that timber harvest in the Blue Mountain Geographic Unit will be restricted to maintain watershed, wildlife, and recreation values. Throughout the entire unit, this will reduce the available harvest by an average of approximately 15%. Depending on the specific site, limitations on timber harvest could range from nearly complete to almost none. Because of other significant resources on the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River, current restrictions on timber management reduce the total amount of forest products available for harvest by approximately 85%.

## Special Status Species Management

### Plants

The existing plant communities and crystal clear stream make the area very unique and attractive. Members of the Oregon Natural Heritage Program and the Nature Conservancy evaluated the lands proposed for ACEC designation on October 9, 1992. A letter received from them indicated their support of the area's designation as an ACEC. They also support the recommendations to exclude livestock grazing and the proposal to acquire additional lands into public ownership within the ACEC boundaries.

They recognized the area as containing a "high" quality example of a paper birch riparian community". They said, "This natural community is very rare in Oregon." They also identified another distinct natural community, the grand fir - Douglas fir/snowberry type. They considered the potential of the area for a Research Natural Area, however stated, "with the realization that recreation use will continue to be popular in the area, we feel at this time, RNA designation is not prudent." They further stated, "overall, the river corridor is in remarkable condition and represents an outstanding opportunity to protect a watershed that has numerous, unique natural values."

The species of *Cypripedium* (lady's slipper) listed earlier are very showy and beautiful plants. This fact makes them, as well as other showy species, highly susceptible to collection by the public especially for the horticultural trade. They also do not survive transplanting well.

Known populations of BLM sensitive species would be protected from disturbance or degradation.

### Animals

Bull trout have been designated as a Category II Candidate Species under the Endangered Species Act. Category II Candidate Species designation are for those species for which U.S. Fish and Wildlife service has information to indicate that listing is possibly appropriate. Additional information is being collected. No site specific population information is available.

The margined sculpin, a non-game fish which is on the ODFW sensitive species list due to its limited distribution also is found here. No site specific information has been collected on this species.

With the current USFS designation of a watershed emphasis for their lands above the BLM stretch and the BLM closure of the bridges, threats to the fisheries habitat have been diminished. However, water purity and temperature will still need to be monitored.

## Cultural Resource Management

Known cultural resources will be protected from disturbance or degradation, pending evaluation of a property's eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. High volumes of concentrated visitor use, and continued unauthorized uses, indicate a need for

increased attention to patrol. Monitoring for cultural resources is also needed. Any ground disturbing actions, or management actions which have the potential for concentrating recreation visitor or vehicle use, will require further cultural resource investigations, evaluations of property significance, and monitoring.

## **Water Quality Management**

The Umatilla National Forest Plan designates the headwaters of the South Fork of the Walla Walla River for limited timber harvesting in favor of water quality and scenic values.

The Director of Public Works, for the City of Milton-Freewater indicated the city has an old water right on the South Fork of the Walla Walla River but has not activated (used) the right for several years. The point of intake for the city is downstream from the ACEC area. If the city does activate its water right, the BLM could expect changes in required water quality management.

Water quality will be affected by road and parking area construction needed for recreational development. The current location of roads, fords, recreational facilities, existing use areas and off-road vehicle use areas may be affecting water quality. There is a lack of water quality baseline data.

## **Fire Management**

There is a greater probability of fires occurring because of heavy public use of the area. There is currently no guidance for wildfire containment, fire salvage or fire rehabilitation for the proposed ACEC area should a wildfire occur.

Reintroduction of prescribed fire may be necessary to restore, maintain, or enhance the vegetation communities.

# ***MANAGEMENT ACTIONS***

## **Lands and Realty Management**

- Seek to acquire unimproved private lands within the ACEC to enhance and/or protect natural values and further management objectives. Acquire from willing owners through purchase, exchange or donation. Acquire conservation easements to prevent incompatible use or development of private land when fee title acquisition is not possible. Acquire private land with improvements (buildings, etc.) only when they pose a specific and significant threat to the management objectives of the ACEC. Acquisition priorities are:

1. Tracts that front the South Fork of the Walla Walla River.
2. Forested tracts.
3. Rangeland tracts.

- Right-of-way grants and renewals shall be limited to the area necessary for operation and maintenance, will consider the protection of public safety and ensure any use authorized

shall be consistent with the ACEC values as designated.

## **Oil and Gas Leasing and Mineral Management**

- Change the management decision in the Baker Resource Area Management Plan Record of Decision from:

All new oil and gas leases subject to standard protective stipulations plus a winter season restrictive stipulation on 119.98 acres; -

to:

All new oil and gas leases subject to standard protective stipulations plus a special “no surface occupancy” stipulation for all public land within the ACEC boundary presently about **1,256.69** acres, plus an additional 302 acres of private surface with Federal Minerals Estate.

- Prohibit development of mineral material resources within the ACEC boundary, unless needed on an “emergency basis,” to protect ACEC values. This area has no known potential for the occurrence of locatable mineral resources therefore withdrawal from mineral entry under the U.S. Mining laws, as amended, is not proposed.

## **Grazing Management**

- Grazing leases will no longer be issued on BLM lands within the ACEC.
- Livestock trailing permits will be considered as long as the trailing period is less than 1 day.



## Recreation Management

- Do not maintain or repair Bridges **#2, #3, #4** on the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River.
- Maintain the first bridge for public and all vehicle use.
- No camping will be permitted on BLM lands, until such time we can provide for it, so its consistent with ACEC management.
- From the road intersection with the western BLM boundary (at the cattleguard) to the gate/barricade, develop intensive recreational facilities such as parking areas, restrooms and trailhead/staging area and information center about the ACEC. These developments should occur within the currently disturbed areas. They should have minimal impacts to the existing riparian vegetation.
- From the gate/barricade to the intersection of the eastern/north eastern BLM boundary and the road, permit limited recreational facilities, (restrooms and trails), while emphasizing protection of the ACEC values.
- Close the river corridor from the cattleguard to the gate/barricade to discharge of firearms.
- Establish law enforcement program to enforce the ORV designation, camping and shooting prohibition. This law enforcement effort would be in cooperation with the Umatilla County Sheriff, Oregon State Police and Umatilla National Forest.
- Establish a facilities maintenance program in cooperation with Umatilla County Parks Commission, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Umatilla National Forest.

### - Short Term

- Remove the 4th bridge.
- Construct a gate/barricade to facilitate this limited access between the stream gauging station and Bridge **#2**.
- Continue to allow **OHV's**, equestrians, mountain bikes and hikers to use the remaining bridges until their removal.
- Work with the Umatilla National Forest to amend right-of-way ORE 017223 and to repair and/or modify the trail on the North side of the river to provide access for **OHV's**, equestrians, mountain bikes and hikers.
- Upon completion of the preceding action, remove bridges **#2** and **#3**.
- Monitor remaining bridges safety and structural integrity annually until removed.

- Long-term (After all bridges and have been removed.)

- Provide access to **OHV's**, equestrians, mountain bikes and hikers on the trail on the north side of the river and on the existing road where its on the north side of the river.
- Construct a gate on the Elbow Creek road before it intersects the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River road to limit access.
- Permit rehabilitation of the old road surface if necessary.

## **Scenic Values Management**

- Ensure that all resource activities meet the requirements of a VRM Class II area.
- Each field management action should be proceeded by a VRM contrast rating inventory to assist in determining layout and design. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

## **Fisheries Management**

- Public informational signs, brochures, and articles concerning the values of the ACEC and the needs for special management will be used where appropriate to help ensure that public use is consistent with the values of the ACEC.
- Increase large woody debris and **instream** diversity as identified by the baseline data.
- Hazardous tree removal will be coordinated with fishery biologists to provide **instream** habitat diversity where needed.
- Work with private landowners and United States Forest Service (**USFS**) upstream to encourage the protection of the fishery habitat. It is important that the overall management of the watershed places a high priority on maintenance or even improvement of the fishery habitat that exists there.
- Collect baseline data on condition and trend of fishery habitat.
- Examine past use of the Salmon-Trout Enhancement Program (STEP) and coordinate with the ODFW as to its future use.

## **Riparian Management**

- Inventory existing species, conditions and characteristics of the riparian plant community.
- Prohibit indiscriminate cutting of live shrubs or trees within the riparian zone.

- From the road intersection with the **western** BLM boundary (at the cattleguard) to the gate/barricade, minimize disturbance of the natural environment by focusing human use away from existing pockets of well established riparian vegetation in good condition. This will be done by designating parking and trails in established use areas and through the use of barricade signs and other public information as necessary.
- From the gate/barricade on upriver, maintain or enhance riparian vegetation by providing for control of recreation use through enforcement of the OHV designation, and establishment of barricades, signs and public information.

## **Wildlife Management**

- Limit OHV traffic beyond the gate/barricade during severe winters, as determined necessary in cooperation with ODFW (between December 15 and March 15) to relieve stress on wintering elk.
- Collect baseline data on wildlife species and habitats of the area.
- If involved parties agree to transplant Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, then BLM will allow transplant and provide habitat where available on public lands.

## **Fire Management**

- In case of wildfire **use** "light hand on the land" only techniques which utilize hand lines, burn outs and air tankers.
- No tractors will be authorized until the Area Manager or designated representative approves.
- No fire salvage will occur unless it meets the goal of ACEC management.
- After a fire authorize immediate rehabilitation methods such as contour falling. Allow **native** plants to re-establish the sites.
- Study the fire history **of the** area and apply to **the** management of the ACEC values through prescribed fire if necessary.
- Any prescribed fire in the area will comply **with** State smoke management requirements.

## **Forest and Woodland Management**

- Continue to exclude timber harvest on 126 acres of BLM lands except permit silvicultural practices on this area which are intended to enhance forest values for other resources and safety. Examples of these types of operations could include non-commercial stocking control to improve tree vigor or remove undesirable species, or prescribed burning to reduce forest fuels and prevent destructive wildfires.
- Permit limited commercial harvest on the remaining 120 acres when such operations are compatible with maintaining ACEC values. This would amount to recovering the value,

as **sawlogs** or firewood, of trees which need to be removed to preserve the ACEC experience or provide for visitor safety. Available harvest in the area would be reduced by **99%**, but yearly timber removal of approximately 2 Mbf (equivalent to about 4 cords) would be permitted.

- Artificially reforest with either commercial or non-commercial tree species and riparian shrubs to maintain ACEC values.
- If snags or green cull trees, which are important for wildlife, also pose a hazard for human use, consider removing the tree tops (by blasting or cutting) to reduce weight and wind resistance.
- Close the area to **fuelwood** cutting except where prescribed for hazard tree removal.
- Forest management activities on any future acquisitions of forestland would be governed by the above guidelines. Commercial activities would either be excluded or limited depending on location and accessibility of the tract.

## **Special Status Species**

### ***Plants***

- Discourage collection of wildflowers in the area by building public awareness through signing, brochures, public contacts, etc.
- Initiate a special botanical study of the area to ensure a complete inventory of species present. Determine if special status plants are present, as well as acquiring baseline data on any special status plants.
- Complete a management plan for special status plants if necessary.
- Establish a monitoring system to measure deviations from baseline data.

### ***Animals***

- Work with ODFW to collect baseline data on bull trout and margined sculpins.
- Maintain quality of habitat for margined sculpin and bulltrout in cooperation with ODFW and Umatilla National Forest.
- Monitor water temperature through use of USGS gauging station information.

## **Cultural Resource Management**

- Evaluate the prehistoric property prior to development of projects or recreation management prescriptions for the ACEC area. When evaluation is completed, a specific use allocation will be made by amendment to the ACEC management plan.
- Exclude vehicle use and surface disturbing actions from a one acre area by installing

physical barriers (gate and fence) to protect the prehistoric property.

- Cultural inventories will be implemented immediately upon identification of appreciable improvement in ground surface visibility at locations within the ACEC. Newly acquired lands will be systematically inventoried and evaluated for cultural resource within one year or as soon as possible following the land acquisitions. If important cultural resources are found as a result of further investigations of Bureau lands, or upon acquired lands, the ACEC management plan shall be amended to incorporate management actions needed for the protection and preservation of such properties.
- The historic Elbow Creek stone chimney/hearth may be stabilized, interpreted, or adapted for recreation use.
- Cooperate with public interest groups and residents to implement a plan for preservation and adaptive use of the stone chimney.
- Complete cultural resource inventories of the area prior to development of recreation management plans or projects.
- Evaluate all ground disturbing projects for potential impacts to cultural resources.
- Archaeological monitoring of projects is required until more comprehensive studies are completed.
- **Coordinate with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to develop** management objectives for cultural resources within the ACEC.

## **Water Quality Management**

- Establish appropriate baseline inventory on water quality data as recommended by the District Hydrologist.
- Recreational developments design and construction must maintain water quality standards.

## ***MONITORING NEEDS***

### **Recreation Management**

- Establish recreation monitoring program to include visitor use, facility and maintenance surveys.
- Monitor the 4 bridges for structural integrity annually until they are removed.

### **Fisheries Management**

- Fisheries condition and trend will be monitored by the BLM at several sites. The studies will be located so as to be representative of both the stream and human disturbances to it. The studies will be reread as necessary, but at least as often as every 5 years.

- Fish census data will continue to be collected by ODFW biologists as needed.
- A limiting factor analysis will be performed to determine if any special management action would be warranted in the future.

## **Riparian Management**

- Monitor riparian community health and regeneration.

## **Wildlife Management**

- Monitor for abundance and species diversity every five years.

## **Special Status Species Management**

### ***Plants***

- Establish and implement a schedule of periodic monitoring of special status plant species to evaluate trend and develop management prescriptions as necessary.

### ***Animals***

- Establish baseline information in BLM files from ODFW data on condition and trend of bull trout, steelhead and margined sculpin.
- Conduct fisheries habitat monitoring within the area.
- Participate in the recovery plans for salmon in the South Fork of the **Walla Walla** River with ODFW if appropriate.
- Monitor water temperature.

## **Cultural Resources Management**

- Monitor the known prehistoric property bi-annually for changes in condition and to protect against unauthorized uses. The monitoring schedule may be revised, upon completion of site evaluations. Monitor field condition changes that may expose archaeological resources.
- Monitoring shall include annual inspection to determine if visibility changes are occurring (through visitor use or natural processes) which would permit further examinations for cultural material.

## ***PERSONS CONSULTED***

Individuals, agencies and groups consulted include:

- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Umatilla National Forest
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
- East Side Rod and Gun Club
- Harris Park staff
- Umatilla County Parks Commission
- Umatilla County Commissioners
- Boise Cascade Corporation
- Off Road Vehicle groups
- Private landowners between BLM lands and USFS lands on the South Fork of the Walla Walla River.
- Oregon Natural Heritage Foundation

## ***LIST OF PREPARERS***

- Dick Hanson - Supervisory Forester
- Matt Kniesel - Wildlife Biologist
- Ralph Kuhns - Geologist
- Jim Ledger - Reality Specialist
- Odos Lowery - Forester
- Dorothy Mason - Resources Staff Supervisor
- Gerry Meyer - Outdoor Recreation Planner
- Mary Oman - Archeologist
- Larry Taylor - Botanist/Supervisory Range Conservationist

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**BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

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Vale, Oregon 97918

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